

# **DC Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)**

## **Community Round Table Meeting**

**Thursday, June 18, 2009; 12:30-1:30pm; Thrive DC**

### **Summary of Responses**

We convened a Community Round Table Meeting in advance of the ICH meeting today. This forum was open to all members of the community, and it was intended to solicit input regarding key issues facing the ICH and those who are homeless in DC. This input was sought to inform the ICH planning process and committees. There were two facilitated focus groups with a total of twenty-four participants who were asked to reflect on the questions below and to offer their input through small group conversation and/or written comments. The summary of responses follows. Those participating were asked to read the section below labeled “Background” prior to the discussion so that group members would have a common understanding of “Housing First.”

#### **Background**

**(Please take 5 minutes at the beginning of this discussion to read the information below about the District’s “Housing First” initiative.)**

The District’s Department of Human Services Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program aims to implement a “housing first” methodology. At DHS, we interpret this to mean that housing itself can be a therapeutic and stabilizing factor. In a “housing first” program, individuals do not necessarily need to spend time in shelter or transitional programs or meet behavioral requirements to qualify for housing. Rather, those who demonstrate a need for permanent supportive housing are offered this housing with services. While in housing, the case managers work with participants on a client-driven plan to achieve improved health, well-being, and to work toward the highest level of self-sufficiency possible.

#### **1. “Housing First” is likely to be one of the key policy directives of the Strategic Plan.**

##### **a. What does “Housing First” mean to you? *Responses:***

Safety and security, but only a small number of people are covered; limited to a particular group.

Non-chronic homeless likely will not qualify; many are not among the most vulnerable. Should be based on need for housing, not vulnerability. Wider eligibility needed.

Alternative to shelter and transitional housing; based on idea that housing “stability” supports ability to take advantage of other services. Transitional housing is still needed for those who need incremental preparation for PSH.

Provides some degree of safety as compared to street or shelter; provides wrap around services.

Clients need to learn about options; need information clearinghouse for resources and referrals.

There must be housing available; concern was expressed about the adequacy of the supply of housing.

There should be an accessible, easily recognized telephone number for applying to the program.

Participants and potential participants need more screening and preparation for housing.

There should be strong connection to and communication with outreach teams.

**b. What are the most important elements of a successful “housing first” approach?**

***Responses:***

There was a broad endorsement for wrap-around services and acknowledgement of the central role of individual case management.

Access to information on services, options, and opportunities is necessary; should be accurate and easily available.

Adequate case managers with a manageable caseload and paperwork that is not burdensome are needed as well as coordination, openness, and transparency.

Case managers should be accountable, evaluated by outside parties and client customer service surveys, and reviewed by peers in other agencies; there should be extra incentives for outstanding case managers who give good service.

Ongoing drug testing.

Good, safe, clean placement for a lifetime. Ninety percent of persons who have been placed in “Housing First” accommodations are still there.

Meet people where they are.

More training, accountability, and oversight are needed for the PSH teams according to the outreach providers

**2. What resources and supports related to employment are most important to support homeless individuals?**

***Responses:***

Client specific—some individuals are high functioning, some may be pre-GED.

Training, especially small programs with limited commitment; upper level training needed for those with work history and advanced skills; example is “Green Door” model of supported employment with a job coach to help with adaptation to work.

Low barrier workshops in drop-in centers for training and preparation; help with résumé writing.

Transportation assistance for job hunting and after one is employed (weekly pass).

Telephone, computer, email, and web access; email and web access are important for job search. Computer and internet skills training needed. “Cricket” may be a solution.

Twenty-four hour shelters with lockers and showers. Access to clothes.

“Job First” program: strength-based skills assessment, needs analysis, determination of interests. Teach skills. Meet people where they are.

Entrepreneurial activities; self-employment options; micro-credit businesses.

“Soft skill” training needed for operating in the business world.

Mentoring and self-esteem and confidence building needed to help in maintaining a job.

Volunteer and intern options would help to build one’s résumé.

Ensure that case managers know where information is on employment and training opportunities.

Criminal history record reform. Sealing, expungement of records.

Employer incentives, tax benefits, and partnerships (example: non-profit day labor group has partnered with Unity Health Care).

Housing is needed for stability.

Employment specialists are needed.

Use the Workforce Investment Act.

Utilize existing resources better.

More government jobs are needed.

Drug testing to verify clean time for employers.

Develop more public awareness of Department of Employment Services (DOES) programs.

There is too much focus on day labor opportunities.

Access to identification.

Information clearinghouse for resources and referrals.

**3. Please take 5 minutes at the end of your conversation to recommend future topics for the ICH pre-meeting discussion:**

***Responses:***

An Urban Institute study last year talked about creation of smaller, specialized shelters (as warehouse shelters are reduced by PSH for chronically homeless). Is this something the city will do?

Need enough shelters for seniors, those with disabilities, and families.

Explore the use of old school buildings for shelters.

Address capacity issues at women's shelters.

Family shelter design and capacity should be addressed. What about boys over 11 years of age? Waiting list? Underutilization of DC General?

Outreach and what it provides to the city: street case management; survival needs; information and referrals. Where is it needed? How best to serve a marginalized population?

The Housing Choice Program should be explored.

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This concludes the summary. This document was compiled by George Shepard of the Department of Human Services using personal notes and input from participants at the Community Round Table Meeting on June 18, 2009. Contact Mr. Shepard at (202) 698-5295 or by [email](#).